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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4521
INFO RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0259

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SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR ACTING UNDER SECRETARY FRIED, P
WHA FOR A/S TOM SHANNON, DAS KIRSTEN MADISON, AND CALEB
MCCARRY
EUR FOR ACTING A/S VOLKER, EUR/WE DIRECTOR KATHY ALLEGRONE
NSC FOR DAN FISK, JUDY ANSLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL SP

SUBJECT: FREED CUBAN PRISONERS GRATEFUL TO PRESIDENT BUSH

REF: A. AMBASSADOR AGUIRRE'S E-MAILS OF 3/17/2008

¶B. MADRID 283

¶11. (U) On March 13, Ambassador Aguirre hosted a follow-up meeting with Omar Pernet and Alejandro Gonzlez-Raga. The two, until recently, had been political prisoners in Cuba. Both of these remarkable individuals individually pressed the Ambassador to personally convey their gratitude to President Bush for his support of Cuban political prisoners, Cuban dissidents, and a democratic Cuba.

¶12. (U) Omar Pernet recounted how, in prison, he hid a small transistor radio inside a bar of soap. Late at night, he would listen to Radio Marti, hearing messages from President Bush. Those messages nourished his soul and kept him alive! Pernet, in particular, mentioned how much he appreciated the President,s mentioning him by name during remarks made at the State Department on October 24, 2007. President Bush had invited Mr. Pernet, s family to be present as well, honoring them and Omar during his statement. Omar and Alejandro earnestly expressed their gratitude for the President,s past statements and the solidarity of the United States with the people of Cuba. They appreciated the Ambassador,s message that, to them, the Madrid Residence is also President Bush,s home in Spain.

¶13. (U) The Ambassador and the Embassy staff have been in personal contact with four recently freed Cuban political prisoners who arrived in Spain about a month ago. Cuban and Spanish authorities met in Madrid on February 11, as part of a revived Spain-Cuba Human Rights Dialogue. Spain provided Cuba a list of names of prisoners of concern, including Oscar Biscet. Less than a week later, up to seven prisoners were released (of course, Biscet was not among them) and four from the group of 75 arrested in 2003 were allowed to travel to Spain for medical treatment. They and their immediate families arrived in Madrid on February 17.

¶14. (U) On March 4, soon after their arrival in Madrid, Omar Pernet, Jos Gabriel Ramn Castillo, Pedro Pablo Alvarez Ramos, and Alejandro Gonzlez-Raga were invited for a group meeting with the Ambassador and his wife at his Residence (ref B). Over coffee, they told the story of their sudden release and whirlwind trip to Spain. They were encouraged to share any concerns or requests. Since such a setting is a little cumbersome, for four individuals to compete for time to tell their compelling stories, the Ambassador offered to meet with each of them individually to discuss their particular situations. Omar and Alejandro returned March 13

for their individualized visit. The discussion centered on Cuba's democratic future, their own status in Spain, their medical conditions, and their concerns on behalf of family members in the United States as well as in Cuba.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Their situation here is unique. They are completely dependent for their subsistence on the GOS and the goodwill of the Cuban community. They are trying to formalize their understanding with the GOS of future assistance, to what extent, and for how long. Each of them will have to make decisions about long-term plans, employment, and asylum or residency based on his individual and familial circumstances.

¶6. (U) While their welfare is primarily the concern of the GOS, we have established ties to these dissidents and plan to stay in close touch. We will also encourage senior Spanish officials to meet with them and hear of their experiences and hopes for a democratic Cuba. We also plan to respond with prompt and accurate information about U.S. visa laws, and provide VIP customer service at our Consular Section, should they wish to apply for visas to visit family members in the United States.

AGUIRRE